

Myra and the Devil

and Motion Picture Drama

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CHAPTER XLVI.

The Astral Alarm.

DR. ALDEN had several days of freedom from the haunting moria of Black Order persecution. Nothing untoward had happened to Myra, and events were so quiet and orderly that the physician began to pick up hope that his ultra-violet rays had indeed accomplished the destruction of the evil genius who presided over the land of Devil Worshipers.

Mrs. Maynard, anxious to free her mind of the distractions, was jubilant. She confided to Arthur Varney, during a family motor ride through the suburbs.

"I am so glad, Arthur. These last few weeks have been a worse nightmare than the week me husband was in. I am glad to see you so thoughtful, yet so gallant in his friendship for Myra, in her trouble. But, my dear Arthur, I confess that he irritates me with his usual conduct."

Varney nodded soothingly. "There was a faint suggestion of a smile as he watched Myra through the corners of his eyes."

"Science is all very well in a laboratory, or a college, but in everyday life it becomes a decided bore."

Myra flushed. "She turned sharply, as she retorted: 'Arthur, this very automobile was invented by scientific men, not by fiddlers who were always looking for good times. It is true that you automobile move leisurely to stupid, lazy, do-nothings with money than anyone else.'"

"Why don't you try to do something with the brain, the mouth, and the hands that God gave you, Arthur?" Varney's confusion conquered his usual complacency, but Mrs. Maynard interrupted laughingly.

"You are out of humor, my dear," said Myra's mother, gently. "You could not have slept very well last night."

Myra nodded her head. She drew her little hand across her face, as though she suffered from a headache. "You guessed right, mother," she said. "I have had the most unpleasant dream lately. I feel more exhausted each morning than I do at night when I retire. I wish I could forget all this horrible stuff."

"What you need, my dear, is a change of scene. I have half a mind to pack our trunks," her mother declared, "and simply disappear with you. We will go away for a few months and not allow anyone in the world to know where we have gone."

Varney looked at her anxiously. "Not even me?"

"No, not even you, Arthur, for there is no telling who may read your mind," Mrs. Maynard replied. "These terrible creatures, whoever they are, seem to know everything, no matter how secret it is kept."

Varney shook his head, belittling the danger. He had his own reasons for not desiring Myra's disappearance from the scene at this juncture.

"I wouldn't do it," he said. "Dr. Alden declares that his invader light, or whatever he calls it, has killed the doctor. The doctor ought to know. And it would be better for you to rest right here in your own home than take chances in some strange place."

But he was plainly uneasy on the matter. When they returned home they found Payson Alden waiting for them. Varney made his excuses and rode on downtown to his club. The physician, awaiting his departure, impatiently brought up a plan upon which he had been working for some time.

The story of Myra's unpleasant dream emphasized to him the need for prompt action.

His remembrance of the drama was unusually clear. They had been recurring for three nights in succession, without change in the cast or the scenes. A group of black-robed men had seemed to float through the air, to her bedside, she told the doctor. There they stood throughout the night, their hands toward her in rhythmic cadence.

She demonstrated with serpentine movements of her hands. Alden nodded understandingly. "Those are hypnotic passes," he declared. "It is just as I have suspected. They have exhausted all the simpler forms of black magic. Now they are resorting to astral visitations in groups. Those were not the phantasies of troupe-dreamers, but the astral bodies of the Black Lodge members, sent upon a definite mission by that cunning scoundrel, the High Master."

Myra's face paled, her heart beat fast, and she clung to the astral, whereby she had so nearly lost her own soul, was still a bitter memory.

"What can the doctor? I am so frightened of it all, even though I have tried to be brave," cried slender white fingers trembled, as she nervously intertwined them.

"You succeeded in being braver than any man would ever have been, under such frightful circumstances," returned the doctor encouragingly. "Just keep up that good spirit a bit longer. The study of years is now coming in handy to you, but will warn me as well back in my home. Then I will be ready to protect you."

He clasped the little hands with an increasing tenderness, looking down cheerily into the big blue eyes.

"How can that be?" demanded Myra, cheered in spite of her haunting premonition of new peril.

"I will show you inside of an hour. I must first telephone to my assistant. He will bring the things over here. May I start to work on them at once, then?"

"Surely, Doctor," agreed the girl. "But you must absolutely pledge your mother to secrecy, for she makes such dear stupid blunders. She has spoiled so many of your things over you, you are always so patient with her."

Alden smiled generously. "Your mother is like nearly everyone else. Despite what we have shown her, she still doubts. And she must tell her about this 'leak' in information, somewhere about the house. After this, we must be very careful with the servants. Willis, the butler, is the only one I really trust."

So it was that in little over an hour a workman, who had announced to her that he came from the electric light company to make some repairs, appeared in the library carrying a heavy bundle of apparatus.

Alden, after swearing Mrs. Maynard to absolute silence, sent him around the house to adjust a special wire to the roof, directly over Myra's window.

This connection was brought inconspicuously into the room, and carried along the wall to a three-paneled screen which had been arranged near Myra's bed. One side of this screen was of ordinary Japanese—a decoration of embroidered Japanese silk.

On the other, the face nearest the bed, were hundreds of delicate vertical wires a quarter of an inch apart, running parallel with each other from the top to the bottom cross-piece.

physician ran his fingers up and down the wires.

He had been too busy instructing his assistant in the delicate task of arranging the connections to explain the nature of the instrument. But now, satisfied with his preparations, he turned toward her with a smile.

"Well, we are ready for the astral trial," he exclaimed. "This thing is coated with a chemical called sulphide of calcium—a substance that glows in the presence of an astral body. So this is the important part of our alarm."

He turned toward the butler and his workman assistant. "It is all right," he said. "You may go now."

When they had left the room he took from a grip a small selenium cell, such as used in electrical experimental laboratories. This he placed on the floor near Myra's dressing table. By its side he laid a storage battery and a small electric bell.

"This cell," he said, pointing to the selenium cell, "is so delicate that it will not let electricity pass through it in the dark. But its composition is such that in the light it will ring a current. So, you may see how this can be utilized."

He conducted the storage battery with the bell, and attached the wires to the tiny tabs on the side of the selenium cell case. Then he removed the cover, allowing the light to strike the sensitized cell.

There was a jangling of the electric bell.

Myra clasped her hands as delightedly as a child with a new toy. "Oh, that's wonderful!" she ejaculated. "But how about that with the astral bodies?"

There's the point—of an astral body, or more than one, about to come to this room, the wire screen coated with sulphide of calcium will glow. The light will fall on the selenium cell—where did you are to remove, when you have turned the lights off—and that will connect with this outside wire. That leads directly to my room and will ring a warning bell there, to let me know! So, have no fear, for tonight I will be able to act."

Mrs. Maynard shook her head hopelessly when they tried to explain the apparatus to her.

"I can't believe such things," she said. "You may be sure that I will tell no one about it, because they would think me very silly, even allow you to put it in the house."

Alden and Myra exchanged smiles, and went downstairs to enjoy their afternoon tea without further efforts to convert her.

CHAPTER XLVII.

The Master Instructs.

WITHIN the dismal quarters of the Black Order an unwanted air of excitement was noticeable among the evil brethren.

The leader of ceremonies was talking earnestly with Arthur Varney, now garbed like the others in the flowing black robe and hood.

Suddenly the crash of the Master's gong resounded through the eerie room. Seven times it was struck, and the members bowed toward the swinging curtains which shut off this compartment from the inner room of their ruler. This signal meant a secret session of the most trusted workers of the sect; it was a call to the pit of the coffin, far underground.

Varney, the leader, and four other members exchanged robes of the order, thumbs up, fist clenched against fists, and then walked slowly through a low door in the rear of the council room. This was shut and barred behind them, as though to guard against even the curiosity of the remaining brethren.

Within the coffin room, where standing on end were thirteen gawky caskets arranged in a row, the members knelt to await the appearance of their guiding spirit.

Suddenly one of the coffin lids flew open, sideways, like waves of the sardonic features of the High Master were disclosed, in the curious crimson glow which always seemed to hover about him in the lodge rooms.

Me leered, with keen scrutiny of the averted faces, as he returned the diabolical sign of the society.

"Are you ready for the last step in the mystery of the hands?" he asked.

"Yes, master. Yet," answered one of the last three nights," answered one of the kneeling men.

"You will be wearier still, from this night's work," answered their ruler. "But this will be the end. I have no place for weary idlers here. And there is no place for Black Order members who go to bed without their death."

"So, beware of disobedience!" The members bowed.

The master seated himself upon a throne, and beckoned to the leader of the ceremonies.

"Lie upon the floor," he commanded. His order was obeyed, although with some apprehension of what was to follow. The master waved his hands toward two of the brothers, as he spoke to Varney.

"Hypnotize them, and bring forth their astrals!" he ordered curtly. "I will do so with the other two."

Varney bowed, and then, with a few dexterous passes of his hands and the skillful pressure between the eyes of a tense thumb caused the subject to pass into the cataleptic condition.

Now the preliminary of the projection. The second man responded readily, as did the third and fourth under the master's manipulations. So practiced in this uncanny work were they, and so used to the mental dominance of the master, that the mesmerist effect was almost breathless in its prompt response to suggestion.

The master now pressed the foreheads of all four, in turn. He walked toward the recumbent figure of the leader of ceremonies, and waved Varney to one side of the room.

"Let your astrals come forth," he commanded. "I will walk to the side of Brother Zela!"

Varney was watching intently, mystified at what was to ensue. Unhappily, he noticed the separation of the spirit from the fleshly bodies was invisible to him.

"Now, two and on either side!" called the master. "Place your astral hands above Brother Zela and lift! Lift!"

Varney had never seen spirit levitation of material objects before. He was astounded to see the form of the leader suddenly rise a few feet from the ground, unsupported by any visible things. He turned to look at the stiff, unconscious figures of the four men. They hardly seemed breathing; there was no indication of muscular activity in their rigid limbs.

"Now bear him to the side of the chamber," commanded the master. The body floating as it seemed, on space, was borne in the direction indicated by his peremptory gesture.

of horror through Varney, used as he was to such supernatural scenes.

A word from the master, and the leader was brought back to the spot from which he had been raised. The ruler walked toward the four faint figures, snapped his fingers sharply before their eyes, and the sleeping faces twitched.

"Awake!" he commanded. "Awake!" Their eyes opened, and they gazed about them in surprise.

"It is successful! gloated the master. 'I have taught you well. Tonight we will succeed, for we have brought to our resource the greatest power of the physical world, combined with my psychic strength!'

The men shuddered, and rubbed their arms, as though they ached from some tremendous straining of the muscles. The master gave them minute instructions for the task of the coming hours, and Varney gave strict heed to the important details which were his to consummate.

Alden was busy working in his bedroom. He had attached a new electric wire to a wall lamp, which had been

plants and flowering shrubs which had been the special pride of Myra's father in his strange life of seclusion and study. The house was transformed into a veritable fairy bower, while the ray young man, who had been the first to enter through a garlanded doorway into the music room.

Myra, however, was the fairest blossom of them all. Alden's gloved hand trembled as he held her, feasting his eyes upon the sweet vision of maidenly loveliness.

Her glorious wealth of golden hair was coiffed simply, yet so alluringly that he longed to caress it.

The ivory shoulders gleamed bewitchingly through the shimmering folds of silk. The depths of those azure eyes, turned up so joyously to his ardent glance, seemed more immeasurable than the arch of a summer sky.

"I'm so glad you have come," Myra said. "My dance order has made me most unpopular, for I have selfishly insisted on saving several waltzes for you, my Lord Tardiness."

"I could not help being late," Alden apologized, "for there were still some

worry over the threats of future trouble which had usually kept her sleepless for hours."

In the lead-lined chamber of the High Master, Arthur Varney stood before the unconscious figure of the evil possessor, who had commanded him to hypnotize him.

Many minutes he waited, until at last the features of the countenance twitched and the black eyes opened.

"I visited her room, in the astral," Varney said. "She has left her window open. Now go at once, with the brethren. Do not delay. No one knows of this, I am certain," said the Master proudly.

But even as he was speaking Payson Alden sat up in bed with a start. The wall light sent its sharp rays into his sleepy eyes, and the electric bell had barely ceased its jangling.

"Great Scott! The astral alarm!" he cried, as he ran toward the telephone. He jerked the receiver from its hook in a frenzy of terror for the girl's safety. There was a provoking delay before the central operator gave the provoking reply: "The party doesn't

answer, sir. You had better wait until morning."

"My dear," he exclaimed. "It is a matter of life and death! Hurry!"

But no response rewarded his impatience.

At last he hung up the receiver. He was certain that something more grave than he had collected must have occurred in the big house if not a single soul were there to answer the call.

He hurriedly donned his clothes, placed a revolver in the pocket of his ulster, drew on an old hat, and ran from the house.

It was very quiet in the semi-suburban district in which the Maynard estate was located. But the shaded street was not as deserted as it was the morning.

A great black limousine, driven with noiseless engines, had come to a stop at the street, sheltered from the view of the house by some broad-spreading beech trees.

Four other brethren descended to the pavement and stood together in a whispered conference.

"It is the hour commanded by the Master!" said Varney, looking at his watch in the dim light from the automobile's side lamp. "Get back into the machine, and we will begin!"

commanded Varney.

The four men obeyed, as Varney clambered into the limousine behind them.

There in the darkness he gave strange commands, and made the manual gestures which had been taught him by the Master. The four men were soon caustic and he spoke to them with the tense, authoritative manner of his chief.

"Go to your bed room and wait that she be levitated out of the window," he commanded. "I will wait below!"

There was no reply. But Varney was certain that the astral form had already left the physical shells behind. He slipped from the car, and followed by his solemn, remaining companion, Brother Zela, cautiously advanced toward the shrubbery toward the summer house in the garden.

The two men, with faces muffled in the folds of black handkerchiefs, now darted across a bare moonlit space, to the shadowy refuge of the rustic summer house.

"You wait here and I will carry her to you," he commanded.

All this time, Payson Alden, running with a speed which he had never attained in the best days of college prowess upon the athletic field, was speeding toward the Maynard home, his heart sinking with every step that drew him nearer.

He seemed as though he would never reach his goal.

Within Myra's bedroom the screen suddenly seemed to glow with a dull crimson glare.

The girl stirred uneasily in her sleep, as the horrid dream of the past night made its new visitation.

The waving hands of the four dim spirits seemed to quiet her, however, as they hypnotized her.

Then it seemed to her that they were exerting some new and dreadful power upon her. She felt as though each of the eight sinewy hands were extended in the shape of a huge magnet. She was being drawn, drawn with a terrible, burning force, which seemed to tear at every muscle every bone, at her very heart.

Payson Alden had reached his journey's end at last. The night of the black car caused him to whip out his revolver, and he peered cautiously inside.

He saw apparently four sleepers or drunken men.

"What can it mean?" he thought. But he dismissed this perplexity from his mind, to rush through the shrubbery and toward the Maynard home.

Arthur Varney stood beneath Myra's window with hands extended, as though waiting for something to be laid in

them. Alden saw the masked figure, and darted into the summer house.

As he did so he bumped into the hiding Brother Zela.

The two men closed in a death grapple, they struggled noiselessly. Alden fearing that a shot from his revolver would warn the man beneath the window, fought out on space.

Suddenly from the open window above, the figure of Myra Maynard seemed to float out on space.

Slowly she appeared, in the dim light of the moon, advancing from the orifice mechanically, inch by inch, as though drawn with difficulty by an unseen power.

Varney was impatient!

"But the inanimate body of the girl was provokingly slow as it swung free of the wall, and then gradually came nearer and nearer to him.

Within the summer house the combat grew more furious.

Alden felt the clutch of muscular fingers at his windpipe.

It seemed as though his eyes must pop from his head, his tongue cleave to his throat at that almost maniacal grasp.

Here was no unskilled batter in this dread science of the professional stranger.

But, remembering the training of gymnast days, he suddenly managed to get a "half-Nelson" grip about the antagonist's brawny neck.

His right arm slid down, between the other's shoulder blades, and hope sprang anew in his heart.

He heard the crunch of a bone, as he slowly twisted an arm, but he was then upward, until his opponent's wrist was touching his own neck.

One arm at last free, Alden brought it around with all the force he could command, against the other's chin!

The fight was over!

He rose to his feet, staggered toward the house, and to his horror saw Myra Maynard's sleeping body, clad in the shimmering silk night dress, clutched in the arms of the masked man.

He drew a line on the fellow's head with his revolver, but was astounded to see the other run toward him.

"That's all right," he heard from Myra's captor, as to his amazement, the sleeping girl was thrust into Alden's own arms!

Then the other man disappeared, running fleetly toward the entrance to the driveway.

Alden, cautiously peering about, disappeared with the girl in his arm, gliding about the corner of the house.

Varney had reached the automobile before a real and something had gone wrong with his calculations. He leaped into the car, snapped his fingers in the faces of the sleepers.

"Something is the matter with Brother Zela!" exclaimed Varney. "Come, we must get him and the girl!"

The five now skulked cautiously over the path which Varney had taken before. As they reached the summer house, he slipped into the shadow, stumbled over an unconscious form. They drew it out to the moonlight.

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